

Fernando Pessoa

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What portion of genius there may be in the present age, it is, in the terms of the case, impossible to determine. Some talent may be suspected. But there is an immense amount of cleverness, and, remarkably so, of expressed cleverness.

The growth of the capacity (possibility) of reading, which is sometimes alluded to as the spread of education, has made a market for written cleverness; people who, in another age, would never have written, are now seduced (into) by print, in the same manner as a woman who, in a quiet provincial environment, would run straight by the simple process of not running at all, is now compelled to make a bourgeoisie of her natural prostitution.

Whether the present age is favourable or not to the detection of genius, is a point to be amply misunderstood. No age is favourable, in the terms of the case, to the detection of genius. But an age where there are currents and cross-currents of thought and conflicts and cross-conflicts of feeling is apter than a stable and grounded time to appreciate the strange and the untoward. Yet there are difficulties. On the one side, there are too many people writing, drawing and otherwise messing up (passing) art. This establishes confusion. On the other hand, this very multitude of artists makes publicity and self-assertion of the lowest kind the defence against obscurity. The result is that on the confusion produced by great numbers there is superimposed the obstruction deliberately made by coteries, sometimes of one man only. The man of genius has greater possibilities than in the worst darkness of the enlightened ages. He is sure of some public, but he is not sure of being able to meet it. He can reckon on acceptance, but not on getting it. Like the two natural halves of the loving Platonic soul, the genius and his public seek each other, but, as commonly happens in the other matter, they often never meet. (. . .)

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"Erostratus". in Páginas de Estética e de Teoria Literárias. Fernando Pessoa. (Textos estabelecidos e prefaciados por Georg Rudolf Lind e Jacinto do Prado Coelho.) Lisboa: Ática, 1966: 202.